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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: AMBASSADOR'S INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
LUNCH

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Summary

1. (SBU) At a February 27 lunch hosted by Ambassador (that included prominent clergymen, M.P.s, think-tankers and journalists), participants in a recent International Visitors Leadership Program on interfaith dialogue praised the quality of their program. They had been impressed, in particular, with examples of how different religious communities worked together in the U.S. to address pressing social issues. Echoing the views of many of the guests, M.P. Volodymyr Stretovych noted that, in terms of religious freedom, Ukraine had made a great deal of progress since independence. Stretovych also argued that, like other European countries, Ukraine needed a unified, national church; such a church had existed in Ukraine prior to the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav, but had been subjugated by the Russian Orthodox Church. The former head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and current Tymoshenko campaign chief, Oleksandr Turchynov, disputed that assertion. Turchynov, who is an ordained Baptist minister, stressed that one of Ukraine's great strengths was its tolerance and diversity; no single denomination lorded it over society. End summary.

Interfaith Dialogue Lunch

2. (U) Ambassador hosted a February 27 interfaith dialogue lunch that brought together leading clergymen, the head of the State Department for Religious Affairs, two prominent M.P.s, as well as a leading journalist and think-tanker who focus on IRF issues.

Three Cheers for IV Program

3. (U) Five of the clergymen were participants in a recent International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) on interfaith dialogue. They spent much of the lunch recapping the trip for the other guests, effusively praising ECA for the quality of the schedule and meetings. They stressed that they had been impressed, in particular, with examples of how different religious communities worked together in the U.S. to address social issues like homelessness, AIDS, and at-risk children. The Muslim member of the IVP group, Kharkiv Imam Rustam Gafuri, specifically thanked Ambassador for including him and for "paying attention" to the concerns of Ukraine's Muslims.

Much IRF Progress Since Independence...

4. (U) Echoing the views of many of the guests, M.P. and Christian Democratic Party leader Volodymyr Stretovych noted that, in terms of religious freedom, Ukraine had made a great deal of progress since independence. Countering the effects of 70-plus years of militant Soviet atheism was difficult. Stretovych argued that, like other European countries, Ukraine needed a unified, national church; such a church had existed in Ukraine prior to the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav, but had been subjugated by the Russian Orthodox Church, he explained.

..."But"

5. (SBU) While seconding Stretovych's views on Ukraine's post-independence IRF progress, the former head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and current Tymoshenko campaign chief, Oleksandr Turchynov, disputed the assertion that Ukraine needed a national church. Turchynov, an ordained Baptist minister, stressed that one of Ukraine's great strengths was its tolerance and diversity; no single denomination dominated society. Turchynov, no friend of the Kremlin, quipped that if the State created a single, national church "we'll wind up looking like Russia or

Belarus."

Gwaltney